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## HOUSTON CHRONICLE ARCHIVES

**Paper:** Houston Chronicle**Date:** THU 06/10/2004**Section:** ThisWeek**Page:** 9**Edition:** 2 STAR**Reprieve from train whistles determined by crossing / 3 intersections may need more improvements**

By HEATHER SAUCIER, Houston Chronicle correspondent

West University Place officials learned on Monday that some area railroad crossings may require more extensive improvements than others if railroad whistles are to be silenced.

In the pursuit for quiet zones, three of the 12 railroad crossing intersections between San Felipe Street and Willowbend Boulevard may require more improvements than the others, said Ron Wicker, assistant city manager and director of the Public Works and Engineering Department for the city of West University Place.

Intersections at San Felipe, Westheimer Road and Bissonnet Street, which affect residents of West University Place and Bellaire, do not have curbed medians, making it easier for drivers to navigate around Union Pacific Railroad's safety arms, he said.

Wicker met with city of Houston officials Monday to continue discussions on a pilot program to establish quiet zones as part of the interim final rule issued by the Federal Railroad Administration last December.

"Almost all the other intersections have geometrics that allow for a median. So what do we do? There has to be some form of protection," Wicker said. "When you've got a divided roadway, cars can't cut through and around safety arms as easily.

"In those particular cases, it may require some sort of either channelization to separate the lanes or possibly a quad arm arrangement."

When intersections do not have medians separating inbound and outbound traffic, there are several options cities can take to improve safety, including non-mountable curbs and quad gates, which consist of four safety arms blocking all lanes of traffic, said Warren Flatau, spokesman for the FRA.

Also at the meeting was Robert Johnson, a Houston resident invited by West University Place City Manager Michael Ross because of the work he has done calculating the risks at each intersection using the FRA's online quiet zone calculator.

Working with outdated FRA statistics on the intersections, which include the number of cars that cross them and speed of the trains, Johnson has generally determined the types of improvements needed at each crossing to establish quiet zones.

The next step is to collect current data on the crossings and determine officially how to designate each as a quiet zone.

The city of Houston has already begun conducting traffic counts, said Wes Johnson, public information officer for the city of Houston's Public Works and Engineering Department.

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